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ABSTRACT

The assumption is made that what the 1990s have in store for users of depository libraries will hinge on three crucial areas: (1) the reform and development of government information policies; (2) changing technology; and (3) the willingness and ability of the depository libraries to accommodate these changes. The uncertain role of the government as information disseminator is discussed, and the question is posed whether it is enough to make information available, or whether the government should be actively involved in promoting accessibility to its use. Effects of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980 are assessed in this context. Also discussed is the Office of Management and Budget's proposed revision to Circular A-130, which states that government agencies should publish materials in electronic format in preference to traditional formats where appropriate, and that publishing agencies should rely on the private sector for dissemination. Potential roadblocks to making available government information in CD-ROM and online formats--in addition to their being an additional expense to depository libraries--are then discussed, including the lack of standardization. Examples of progress being made by depository libraries in combatting these difficulties are offered, e.g., through resource sharing and user education. (SD)

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DEPOSITORY LIBRARIES IN THE 1990s

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The Depository Library Program

Every statistician must be aware of the importance of federal statistical information. It is probable, however, that not so many are aware of a major government program through which that information is disseminated to the public: the Depository Library Program. There are at present about 1400 federal depository libraries located throughout the fifty States and overseas territories. Through the program the government distributes government publications to libraries without charge. The depository libraries, for their part, make these publications available without charge to the public.

The Depository Program is governed by Title 44 of the *U.S. Code*, Public Printing and Documents, and run by the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO). Title 44 requires that agencies of the executive branch procure their printing through the Government Printing Office (unless granted an exception by the congressional Joint Committee on Printing).[1] They are also required to give the Superintendent of Documents a monthly list of their publications that were obtained from sources other than the GPO.[2] The GPO prepares a list of all government documents published in a particular month, The *Monthly Catalog of U.S. Government Publications*, and ensures that enough copies are printed for distribution to the depository libraries.

The heart of the law, as far as depository libraries are concerned, is the requirement that copies of agencies' publications (with some exceptions) be made available for distribution to the depository libraries.[3] Nevertheless, despite Title 44, it is estimated that less than half of government publications that should be distributed through the depository library program are captured by the system.[4] The problem of "fugitive" documents is a long-standing one and threatens to increase as technology encourages decentralized publishing.

The depository libraries' obligation in this partnership is to make the publications available and accessible to the general public. The depository libraries vary a great deal in their size and character. They may be academic, public, law school, special, or government libraries; large, medium-sized, or small; in urban or rural settings.[5] There is at least one regional library in almost every state; regional libraries are obliged to accept all the publications distributed in the program, 20,000-25,000 items per year. Most depository libraries, however, are selective; that is, they have the right to choose, within certain guidelines, what and how much, they want to receive. As a rule, the most comprehensive collections and services can be found in large public and academic libraries.

Although the publications are free, being a depository is in no way a low-cost proposition for a library. Space and furniture to house the documents must be provided, and in the case of microformats and electronic formats, machines, hardware and software to use them. The libraries must provide staff to process the documents for use (e.g. catalog, mark, bind, shelve, etc.) and staff to help the public find and use government information. The American Library Association is only now in the process of trying to gather data about the cost of being a depository. From preliminary estimates we can say that it runs in the hundreds of thousands of dollars for large depositories.

The Depository Library Program has succeeded in placing hundreds of thousands of publications in American libraries. Up to now nearly all of those publications have been in paper or micro formats. As government agencies move into publishing in electronic formats, the nature of depository library collections and services will have to change to survive. What the 1990s have in store for the users of depository libraries will hinge on three crucial areas: the reform and development of government information policy, changing technology, and the willingness and ability of the depository libraries to accommodate these changes.

Information Policy Reform

Government information policy has been in a state of considerable flux for nearly ten years and underlying the uncertainty is a conflict over what the government's role ought to be in disseminating information. Is it enough simply to make the information available or should the government be

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actively involved in promoting accessibility and use?

Over the years, Congress, through Title 44 and various other statutes has asserted that the Federal government should have an active role to ensure the free flow of information. Last year's Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) report, *Informing the Nation*, points to the multitude of congressional actions to institutionalize the government's role in information dissemination functions and concludes that congressional intent encourages or frequently *requires* "unimpeded dissemination of and access to Federal information. . .."[6]

The Reagan Administration waged an aggressive campaign to reduce the government, and this included a reduction of the government's role in information collection and dissemination. Using the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980 as a mandate the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) attempted to develop a comprehensive policy for information handling and control. OMB's policies are contained in Circular A-130 "Management of Federal Information Resources."[7] A-130 emphasized the economic value of information and the necessity to apply cost-benefit principles to information collection, production and dissemination. It showed a decided preference for the private sector's role in information dissemination. Agencies were instructed to disseminate their information only if required by a specific law or as necessary for their mission, and then, only if it did not duplicate what is, *or could be* done by the private sector. Further, agencies were instructed to recover the costs of dissemination through user charges where appropriate. After vigorous lobbying librarians managed to get the depository libraries mentioned in the introduction as "a safety net" for the information poor, but dissemination to the depository libraries was virtually ignored in A-130 as it was originally promulgated.

In the first term Reagan Administration officials amused the press with garbage bags of "useless" publications that were being eliminated. Among these were publications such as the *Handbook of Labor Statistics*, which suspended publication with the 1983 compilation and the *Statistical Reporter* which ceased publication in 1982, to name only two among thousands.[8] In other cases it was not just the publication that was eliminated, but also the collection of the information in the first place. OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) has blocked hundreds of agency requests for information collection.[9] Everyone is aware, for example, of the monumental battle over the questions and sample sizes of the 1990 Census.

Some publications that were eliminated by the government were picked up by private sector publishers -- at a price. *The Federal Statistical Directory* cost $5 when it was last sold by the Government Printing Office in the 1979 edition. It was also distributed without cost to the depository libraries. In 1987 the private sector edition (compiled from information supplied by the government) cost $32.50, a 550% increase in price and it was not distributed free to the depository libraries.

The need for a comprehensive review of information policy by Congress has been evident for a long time. The revolution in information technology only makes that need more pressing. When the laws governing the Depository Library Program were written or revised (1895, 1923, 1962, 1972, 1978), publishing in electronic formats was either undreamt of or, at the time of the latest revision, not widely practiced by government agencies. The language of Title 44 refers quite clearly to the dissemination of print-based formats (including microformats) to the depository libraries. Section 1901 defines a government publication as "informational matter which is published as an individual document at Government expense or as required by law." Whether Title 44 can be interpreted to include electronic formats is arguable. Advocates in the library community and in Congress point to the intent of the statutes -- to deliver information to the general public. The Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Revision of Title 44 in 1979 explicitly included electronic formats because "[t]his encompasses an affirmative action by the government to make information available which is of broad public interest."[10]

The Executive Branch has taken the opposite view. In order to ensure that public information in electronic formats will be considered a "government publication" under the terms of Title 44, as the OTA report has pointed out, "A renewed commitment [on the part of Congress] to public access in an electronic age may be needed."[11]

On January 5, 1989 OMB published in the *Federal Register* a proposed revision of Circular A-130, applying its principles to electronic formats. In short, it said that agencies should use electronic technologies in preference to traditional formats, where appropriate; that they should rely on the

private sector for dissemination; that they should not themselves create value-added features (e.g. search and retrieval software) unless the private sector could not; that they should recover costs of reproduction and dissemination; that statistical periodicals (including those in electronic format) no longer be exempted from management reporting requirements (i.e. a vehicle for OMB control); and that dissemination of electronic formats to depository libraries was voluntary, i.e. not within the jurisdiction of Title 44.

Public comment was largely negative. Librarians and other public interest groups objected to a strong bias in favor of private sector initiative that would effectively have closed off access to all but those able and willing to pay and to those with access to computers and computer skills. Whether in reaction to public comment, to Congressional pressure, or because the OMB of the Bush Administration is a "kinder and gentler" OMB, they did agree to reconsider the revision and on June 15 came out with a vastly different proposal.[12]

The new proposal affirms the government's obligation ". . .to make. . .information readily available to the public on equal terms to all citizens. . .."[13] Further, they have withdrawn the suggestion to include statistical periodicals in management reporting requirements, i.e. statistical periodicals will continue to be protected from tampering. They have disavowed any intent to favor the private sector, either for dissemination or for software development. And they have agreed to "consider requiring that agencies ensure that the appropriate information products are made available to the depository libraries."[14] In short, many of the objections librarians had to the original proposal have been met.

This is only a proposal for policy-making, not the policy itself. There are still disturbing elements. Continuing to characterize government information as an "asset", for example, signals to many that the economic importance of government information (information as an economic commodity) may still supersede its importance as a free public good.

Whatever the eventual shape of Circular A-130 federal information policy needs legislative guidance. David Plocher, staff attorney of the public interest group, OMB Watch, in recent testimony before Congress articulated the foundation of such guidance:

> [Congress] must reaffirm the Federal government's general obligation to maintain the flow of information throughout society. Such a policy should, at a minimum, affirm the Federal government's responsibility to ensure:
> (1) Collection and evaluation of comprehensive data about national and international conditions, government programs, and public policies;
> (2) Dissemination of information (to be widely available and equally accessible) about government operations and other public issues and concerns; and
> (3) Maintenance of the free flow of information, in all formats (print and electronic), to guarantee unrestricted access for an informed citizenry to learn of and speak out on issues of concern.[15]

Technology and Depository Libraries

Government information policy is only one of the issues that affect the future of electronic formats in libraries. The technologies and the applications made by federal agencies will play a large part in determining their availability in depository libraries. At present what is under consideration by federal agencies are microcomputer-based technologies: video disks, CD-ROMs, WORMs, diskettes and online files accessed by microcomputers. The most prominent formats for the near future will be CD-ROM and online. The GPO is conducting pilot projects with the depository libraries using these technologies and, in addition, the Census Bureau has announced that the 1988 *County and City Data Book* and *County Business Patterns* and well as several products of the 1987 Economic Censuses and the 1990 Census of Population and Housing will be available on CD-ROM.

Many of the depository libraries already have and use some of the technologies under consideration. A 1988 survey by the General Accounting Office showed that of the 403 depository libraries responding 337 had microcomputers with modems for online access and 169 had CD-ROM readers.[16] Libraries are trying to prepare to accommodate the new technologies. However, there are still serious hurdles to be met. Standardization is one.

Government-wide standards for data collection, transfer, storage, access and dissemination have yet to be established. Electronic information will only be accessible and useful if collected, stored and collated under the widest acceptable and generally useful computer format standards. Without standards and coordination among government agencies, we will have a complex and

expensive (for the user) jumble of uncontrolled, inaccessible data in a milieu of benign technical neglect, a system in which each agency does the cheapest, most expedient thing, regardless of public needs or rights. Worse, the chaos inherent in such a situation could allow an ideologically motivated bureaucracy to form a new technology of secrecy.

The lack of a common command language is one of the more visible examples of the problems caused by lack of standardization. If one added together all of the command languages needed to access all of the CD-ROMs, online databases and bulletin boards that the government or its surrogates use to disseminate information, the number would run in the hundreds.

It is argued that a common command language is not important in many cases because so many of the databases are menu-driven. This in itself is a problem. Menus limit drastically the ways in which databases can be used. Census Test Disk Number Two on CD-ROM, to give an example that has already been distributed to depository libraries, is not much different from paper publications. Through the menus one is led to columns of figures. There is not much a researcher can do except print the data. The menu does not even allow the option of downloading the data to a disk. Of course, this is only a test disk. One would expect that the results of the test will show that users want and need both the simple access to the data and the ability to apply more sophisticated software to the files. Programs, such as Lotus 1-2-3 and Quattro, are available in many libraries and could be used with such files. In fact, commercial publishers and organizations, OECD for example, already produce microcomputer data files using such specifications.

I have ignored thus far the format that is probably of greatest use to professional statisticians, magnetic tapes. Government information on magnetic tape has been around for a long time, but tapes are not distributed through the Depository Library Program. Depository librarians have not made an issue of this. In the early 1970s the Census Bureau offered tapes to research institutions. Not many depositories took advantage of the offer. Few libraries have the hardware to mount these massive data files. Even those that have access to a mainframe have largely left the acquisition and servicing of these tapes to their institutions' computer centers. Although librarians have enthusiastically embraced automated bibliographic databases, they have been much slower to accept responsibility for numerical and textual databases. I think this is changing.

A few libraries have established cooperative links with their computer centers, using librarians as intermediaries. One would hope that this represents the wave of the future. The University of Florida Library, for example, provides help with accessing Census information on tape. A Reference Department librarian helps select the appropriate database and file and, using the printed documentation, explains the data elements and variables. A Library systems staff person helps with access and manipulation of the files. At Penn State the library is cataloging the Computer Center's collection in the online library catalog and providing documentation in the library. (But not, as yet, expert advice on using the files.) The challenge for libraries is to find the expert staff and the funds to pay for these kinds of services. As Jones and Kinney of the University of Florida point out, "To provide these services requires various levels of expertise in programming and online services, all of which involve costs."[17] It might be added that these are costs that cannot be borne by all depository libraries.

The Depository Library Program, as it is currently constituted, does not offer a solution. Libraries are free to select or not select whatever is offered. Providing access to materials (equipment, software, staff) is the library's responsibility. There is no well-organized system of shared acquisition and use of resources. Only the Regional Libraries have formal contractual responsibilities to serve the selective libraries in their States. Many of them are already overburdened with their present duties.

The Association of Research Libraries has proposed a most reasonable solution, a system in which electronic information formats would be distributed only to selected libraries.[18] This would save the government the potential cost of having to distribute to 1400 libraries. The libraries that receive the materials would then be responsible for serving those depositories in their areas that remain without any electronic resources or with only limited collections. This would help solve the problem of equal access for those libraries that simply do not have the resources to mount and service all kinds of electronic formats. Libraries have long experience with such interlibrary cooperation in the lending of print materials. It is an option worth exploring.

Conclusion

Whatever the outcome of the current initiatives to reform the depository library program and whatever the directions technology imposes on us, depository libraries will either meet the challenge or diminish in usefulness. In the past few years depository librarians have pressed the government for more electronic resources in the Depository Library Program. The willingness and the ability to take them on is definitely growing. Ever the optimist, I believe that depository libraries *will* find a way to continue to serve the public effectively and that they ". . .will move beyond their traditional role as repositories and become gateways to information. . ." [19] whatever the format.

Endnotes

[1]*United States Code*, Title 44, Section 501.
[2]*United States Code*, Title 44, Section 1902.
[3]*United States Code*, Title 44, Section 1902-1903.
[4]Cynthia Bower, "Federal Fugitives, DNDs and Other Aberrants: A Cosmology," *Documents to the People* 17:3 (September,1989), 120-126. Bower's study indicated that 40-46% are not disturbed to depository libraries, and this does not include Department of Defense publications, which, if included, would bring the proportion of fugitive documents to well over 50%.
[5]The breakdown is: 55% academic libraries, 23% public libraries, 11% law school libraries, 7% federal libraries, 4% special libraries. Source: U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment. *Informing the Nation: Federal Information Dissemination in an Electronic Age*, OTA-CIT-396, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1988), 14.
[6]*Informing the Nation*, 259.
[7]Various revisions of OMB Circular A-130 can be found in the *Federal Register*: 50 FR 10734 (15 March 1985); 50 FR 52730 (24 December 1985); 51 FR 461 (6 January 1986)
[8]It was learned in the meeting at which this paper was presented that the *Handbook* had just resumed publication.
[9]OIRA actions are chronicled in the monthly OMB Watch publication *Monthly Review*, available from OMB Watch 1731 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009-1146.
[10]U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on Printing, Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Revision of Title 44 to the Joint Committee on Printing. *Federal Government Printing and Publishing: Policy Issues* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), 31.
[11]*Informing the Nation*, 255.
[12] 54 FR 25554
[13] 54 FR 25557
[14] 54 FR 25558
[15]David Plocher, Testimony before the Procurement and Printing Subcommittee of the Committee on House Administration, United States House of Representatives concerning the Office of Management and Budget and the Reform of the Federal Printing Laws, May 24, 1989.
[16]*GAO Federal Information Users Survey, 1988*, cited in *Informing the Nation*, 133.
[17]Ray Jones and Thomas Kinney, "Government Information in Machine-Readable Data Files: Implications for Libraries and Librarians," *Government Publications Review* 15:1 (January-February 1988), 29.
[18]*Technology & U.S. Government Information Policies: Catalysts for New Partnerships* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1987), 22.
[19]Harold B. Shill, "A Basis for Increasing Public Access to Federal Electronic Information," *Government Information Quarterly* 6:2 (1989), 136.